



Department of Justice
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Southern District of Texas

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DRUG SMUGGLER SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON

LAREDO, TX – Ernesto Gonzalez, Jr., A/K/A Ernest Gonzalez, a United States citizen from Mathis, Texas, was sentenced to life in prison for his role in a plot to smuggle large amounts of marihuana across South Texas. The sentence was handed down by United States District Judge George Kazen on June 13, 2006, announced United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle.

On January 4, 2005, defendants Carlos Chapa and Ernesto Gonzalez, Jr. were indicted and charged with conspiracy and possession with intent to distribute in excess of 1,000 kilograms of marihuana. The indictment stemmed from the seizure of 1,011 kilograms of marihuana at the U.S. Border Patrol checkpoint on FM 1017, approximately 36 miles south of Hebbronville, Texas, in the early morning hours of March 13, 2004. The marijuana was concealed in a tractor-trailer driven by a third defendant, Rickey Gonzalez, who was also prosecuted for his connection with the case.

Subsequent to the arrest of Ernesto Gonzalez, the United States filed an enhancement informing the District Court that Gonzalez had two prior felony drug convictions. Specifically, in April 1992, Gonzalez was convicted for delivering a controlled substance in San Patricio County, Texas, and in November 2001 he was convicted of possession of marihuana in Gadsden County, Florida. Gonzalez also has a prior felony conviction for burglary of a habitation in 1988 in San Patricio County.

Ernesto Gonzalez was convicted of possession with intent to distribute in excess of 1,000 kilograms of marihuana, and Carlos Chapa was convicted of being an accessory after the fact. Because of his criminal history, Gonzalez, who is classified as a Career Criminal Offender under the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, was sentenced to the statutorily mandated term of imprisonment of life. Carlos Chapa was ordered to serve 40 months in custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons for his role in the offense. In a separate sentencing proceeding in September 2004, U.S. District Judge Keith Ellison sentenced Rickey Gonzalez to a life term for his role in the marihuana trafficking scheme. There is no parole in the federal criminal justice system.

This case was investigated by agents of the United States Border Patrol and the Drug Enforcement Administration. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew Rinka.

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